

Email this article
Print this article
Most popular pages

[Click to send](#)
Choose File Print or Ctrl P or Apple P
[Today](#) | [This Week](#)

Fwy to cut deep in South Mtn

Pecos route calls for carving 3 passes

Kerry Fehr-Snyder
The Arizona Republic
Sept. 14, 2006 12:00 AM

Three cuts up to 20 stories high and more than two football fields wide would be carved through South Mountain if a proposed freeway is built along Pecos Road in Ahwatukee Foothills to connect with 55th Avenue in Laveen.

The cuts under the proposed alignment for the South Mountain Freeway have gotten little notice compared with the high-profile private property issues. Hundreds of homes would be demolished to make way for the freeway and many residents are opposed to the alignment for that reason.

But environmentalists and park advocates are equally upset by the plan to bulldoze or bore through the South Mountain Preserve, the nation's largest municipal park with more than 16,000 acres.

"To some degree, all the mountains are sacred. It's a being of Mother Nature. Everything has life, and it doesn't make sense to blow her (the mountain) up, it doesn't make sense to build on her. It's just disrespectful," said Ginger Sunbird Martin, a member of the Gila River Indian Community and a cultural concierge with the Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa.

The Gila River Indian Community is opposed to the freeway being built on its land and has prevented the Arizona Department of Transportation from even studying the possibility of such an alignment.

The stance that the mountain is sacred might be leveraged in shifting the alignment onto reservation land, but the Gila River community isn't talking.

"The key for us at looking at this option is to minimize the impacts or enhance access to the park," ADOT spokesman Matt Burdick said.

Brian Smith, an Ahwatukee Foothills resident and pilot for US Airways, said talk of such cuts into the mountainside shouldn't be minimized.

"I think it's being downplayed by ADOT," he said of the impact. "It's a severe impact to the mountain and the park, and I think people would be outraged by it."

Smith said he believes there has been no outcry about the mountain's destruction because few people understand what's actually being considered.

The Loop 202 South Mountain Freeway is envisioned as a 22-mile freeway that would link Interstate 10 in the southeast Valley with I-10 in the West Valley, bypassing downtown Phoenix. ADOT estimates the freeway's price tag at \$1.7 billion and its completion by late 2015.

The proposed alignment is along Pecos Road in Ahwatukee, cutting through the western edge of the South Mountain Preserve and along 55th Avenue in Laveen.

Last year, the Phoenix Parks and Recreation Board voted unanimously against allowing the proposed freeway to carve a canyon out of the mountain.

Diana Brooks, chairwoman of the board, said most members are adamant park supporters who foresee disastrous impacts to animals and plants should the freeway be built as planned.

In addition to the ridge cuts, two of which would be in the park, ADOT has considered building bridges over the mountain. But that option "honestly is not very possible because you'd need a bridge that would be 200 feet in the air," Burdick said.

The only other option, he said, is tunneling through the mountain.

"I guess tunneling would be better than cutting through it, but it's still virgin desert, it's still cutting through the flora and fauna," Brooks said. "Our preference still would be to look for another alternative."

A total of 32 acres would be destroyed under the current proposal to cut away three ridgelines to make way for the freeway. ADOT acquired 16 acres for the freeway in the 1980s and would need to double that amount to accommodate the 10-lane freeway, which would have five lanes in each direction.

Although the roadway would take less space, ADOT would have to carve out a rock-fall containment ditch on each side of the two ridges within the park. A ditch would be required only on one side for the final leg of the proposed freeway. ADOT is preparing an environmental impact statement that would spell out all the proposed freeway impacts, including those to air quality and wildlife habitat. The study is not expected to be finished until next year.

The final decision about if and where to build the freeway rests with the Maricopa Association of Governments and the Federal Highway Administration.

ADOT has posted several aerial photos of what the proposed cuts would look like. The photos are at www.southmountainfreeway.com under maps section at the Eastside/Pecos Road alignment links.

Laurel Arndt, a member of the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team and an Ahwatukee Foothills resident, said the impact is hard to visualize without hiking the area or flying over the mountain, something she did about four months ago.

"You can see what it's going to be like, how big the ridge line cuts will really be," she said. "It will be really awful."

Email this article
Print this article
Most popular pages

Click to send
Choose File Print or Ctrl P or Apple P
Today | This Week